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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to define the concept of land memory in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, considering it in relation to scholarship by Jeffrey Andrew Barash, Paula Gallant Eckard, Patricia San José Rico, and others. This exploration of the relationship between land and memory alongside the magical realistic novel, *Mama Day*, reveals how the island's memory constructs, preserves, and conveys the past while influencing the present. The island of Willow Springs retains and remembers the events that transpired there in 1823, which tethers the past to the present and exposes a ripple of consequences felt by Naylor's characters. The author utilizes land memory in order to reveal how remembrances and trauma can and have affected generations of oppressed people, specifically Africans and African Americans. She reveals how African culture and the trauma surrounding African diaspora can persist in these individuals through ancestral ties.

Keywords: land memory, collective memory, trauma, African diaspora, cultural history, matriarch, Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Island Remembers

Land Memory, Collective Memory & Trauma in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

by

Justine Prusiensky

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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English Department

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THE ISLAND REMEMBERS
LAND MEMORY, COLLECTIVE MEMORY & TRAUMA IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S *MAMA*
DAY

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Montclair, NJ

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1. Introduction

This project considers the relationship between memory and land through the exploration of Gloria Naylor's fictional island, Willow Springs, in her 1988 novel *Mama Day*. The objective is to construct the concept of "land memory" as it appears in Naylor's novel, which interacts suggestively with recent discourse on collective memory and trauma. Land memory is a term that I developed in response to Naylor's novel and the ways in which she illustrates the tethering of the past to the present through a site of trauma. By reading in this discourse, I have been able to apply studies on memory and trauma to this fictional concept. In order to successfully develop this concept, I examine to what degree *Mama Day* welcomes this interpretation, and how collective memory and trauma have been applied to fiction. Furthermore, to substantiate this claim I relate land memory to existing literary concepts, such as cultural and collective memory and trauma studies. It is my assertion that, within *Mama Day*, the island of Willow Springs itself remembers the events that transpired there in 1823, which causes a rippling effect of consequences for future inhabitants, who are doomed to repeat the traumas for generations to come.

1.1 *Willow Springs*

The actions of Willow Springs's progenitor matriarch, Sapphira Wade, establish the identity and the law of the land for posterity. I use the term "law of the land" to describe cultural practices and expectations, not legislation. These cultural practices, such as the annual Candle Walk, are performed without full knowledge and understanding of their origin. The inhabitants of the island have always participated in Candle Walk night, although every generation has conducted this practice in its own way:

Over here nobody knows why every December twenty-second folks take to the road—strolling, laughing, and talking—holding some kind of light in their hands. It's been going on since before they were born, and the ones born before them . . . It'll take generations [Miranda] says, for Willow Springs to stop doing it at all. And more generations again to stop talking about the time “when there used to be some kinda 18 & 23 going-on near December twenty-second.” By then, she figures, it won't be the world as we know it no way—and so no need for the memory. (Naylor 110-11)

Throughout the generations, this tradition has been modified, but the repetition¹ preserves the memory of Sapphira Wade. It links together the descendants of Sapphira and the other inhabitants—whose families have lived in Willow Springs since Sapphira took possession of it—to the land. The truth about Sapphira and how she came to obtain the island, among other instances, are unclear to both Naylor's characters and the reader, who have both been exposed to several different versions of the truth, including exaggerated and mysterious accounts.

The reference to “18 & 23” from the quote above, is another example of something outsiders cannot understand; “outsiders” are anyone who comes from beyond the bridge to Willow Springs (including those who leave and come back), who Naylor refers to as in-betweens (15). Naylor writes, “It was just our way of saying something,” and those who use it, understand its connotation (7). Patricia San José Rico's insight into this moment in the text is critical to understanding the barrier between the inhabitants and outsiders. She submits:

What that something is, is part of memory. It is a reference to 1823, the historical year in which Bascombe Wade deeded his land to his slaves and Sapphira allegedly murdered him. But it also refers to . . . the whole of the traumatic

memory embedded in Willow Springs and, in the minds and hearts of its inhabitants, to the part of history that is never recorded in books but passed on through storytelling and memory-work. Therefore, any attempt to fully explain what 18 & 23 means would entail telling and understanding what those traumatic memories have done to the collective identity of the inhabitants of Willow Springs, their meaning and significance as well as their present consequences.

(Rico *Creating Memory* 94)

Outsiders and in-betweens do not have access to the secrets and memories held by Willow Springs and its inhabitants. The trauma that occurred at the other place—so named by the author (see fig. 1 in the appendix)—cannot be explained to those who are not genetically connected to those that experienced it. Jeffrey Andrew Barash illustrates the disconnect between those who have “original encounters,” “in the flesh,” and to whom these encounters are conveyed (41). Barash points to an autobiographical account of dinner at President George Washington’s house, in Philadelphia, in the early 1790s.² He suggests that all accounts of this event and any commissions by writers, sculptors and the like, to convey this encounter to posterity would fail to capture the essence of the in the flesh encounter (Barash 40-1). In *Mama Day*, the reader has more knowledge of the history of Sapphira Wade than do the characters of the novel.³ Naylor provides the reader with paratextual documents—including a map of Willow Springs (fig. 1), a bill of sale for the slave and future matriarch of the island, Sapphira (fig. 2), and a family tree of her descendants (fig. 3)—which, as Laura Nicosia writes, provide deeper insight into Willow Spring’s past that Naylor’s characters do not have access to—noting the bill of sale as the best example of the disparity between the reader’s knowledge and that of the characters (1).

When Miranda *Mama Day*, discovers the ledger containing this document, “the pages are swollen and discolored from years of dampness” (Naylor 279). She is only able to read fragments of the document, which is too damaged to piece together. Nicosia asserts that these paratextual documents “lure the reader into a shared confidence with the author” (1). She further states: “the four metafictional paratexts . . . enable the reader to: rise above the story-in-process; acquire a quasi-omniscient point of view; and partake in the privileges of an authorial intimacy:” (1). These metafictional paratexts and the magical realistic quality of the novel create a space in the discourse for the relationship between land and memory.⁴

1.2 *Land Memory*

It is important to understand that much like the island of Willow Springs, land memory must be a fictional concept or rather a concept applied to fiction. The basis of this concept is rooted in ideas about collective memory and trauma. Collective memory has been scrutinized for its anthropomorphic tendencies, and by extension, land memory cannot avoid this criticism.⁵ Rico argues: “the notion of a collectively shared memory of a past trauma *clinically* affecting the individual members of a community is a highly contested theory and should be considered with extreme caution” (*Creating Memory* 6). It is not my intention to personify the island of Willow Springs. However, my assertion that the land of Willow Springs “remembers” the events that transpired there in 1823, stretches the bounds of anthropomorphic language, in as much as memory is considered an ability designated for humans and unique to the individual. Land memory acts as an active agent in the novel, acting on both the inhabitants of Willow Springs and outsiders, though the outsiders might not recognize this interaction taking place. The inhabitants are sensitive to the memory that the land provides and how it acts upon them, outsiders are unaware of the possibility.

Naylor limns the island to serve as an isolated space that embodies stability, identity and a specific set of rules. The narrative shifts between these spaces—the various islands—through the characters’ and narrator’s perspectives. The reader is given glimpses into Manhattan, Staten Island, Willow Springs, and Naylor’s metaphorical island—the football stadium. All of these islands act as a refuge for one or more characters in the novel and are portrayed as distinct atmospheres. Willow Springs requires the reader to surrender to its isolated reality. Naylor uses metafiction and magical realism to test the limits of the law of the land. The rules established in her other islands, previously mentioned, are hardly noticeable to the reader because they are familiar. The culture is familiar and therefore so are their customs. The rules of Willow Springs are obscure and can only be fully understood by the inhabitants because of the island’s magical qualities. The inhabitants are familiar with conjure and understand its presence in their lives. Outsiders cannot identify what these rules are, but they can recognize the presence of different customs. The inhabitants do not have a definition for these rules, but they understand them through generational ties.

I have developed the concept of land memory in response to Willow Springs and its unique qualities. Pierre Nora, a French historian known for his essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” proves helpful in understanding this concept. Nora writes:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de*

mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer *millieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory. (7)

Nora's essay appears in several other scholarly works on the subject of memory.⁶ I will shift his assertions on "sites of memory" in order to substantiate the concept of land memory. Nora also suggests that "[m]emory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present" (8). Naylor's "the other place," acts as a site of memory throughout the text, despite the fragmented knowledge—of both the inhabitants and the reader—concerning what happened there and the secrets held by Miranda and Abigail—the Day sisters (see fig. 3). The secrets of the other place act as a bond tying the past to the present. Miranda and Abigail cannot forget what they experienced there, but the site of memory preserves their experiences. Abigail cannot bring herself to visit the other place because the memories are too painful. Nora's assertions about sites of memory ring true for other scholars, such as Jenni Adams.

Adams approaches a version of this concept in her essay, "Cities Under a Sky of Mud: Landscapes of Mourning in Holocaust Texts," as she illustrates the connection between landscapes, memory and mourning in Holocaust literature. She writes:

Far from presenting an inappropriate, kitsch or falsely consolatory vision of Holocaust history, magic realist Holocaust fictions offer an innovative means of foregrounding the limits of Holocaust representation, through the use of supernatural motifs resistant to assimilation into a realist conception of history.
(Campbell 158)

Accordingly, Naylor utilizes these literary techniques in order to represent African diaspora, the slave narrative and the black experience. The legend of Sapphira Wade is rooted in these

overlapping discourses, and the fictive qualities of the novel allow Naylor to create an island that remembers Sapphira's past and tethers it to the present:

It ain't right or wrong, truth or lies; it's about a slave woman who brought a whole new meaning to both them words, soon as you cross over here from beyond the bridge. And somehow, some way, it happened in 1823: she smothered Bascombe Wade [see fig. 2] in his very bed and lived to tell the story for a thousand days. (Naylor 3)

The events that took place between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade are unknown to the characters and the reader. The legend has shifted over time, and several stories have been told and retold. The island's seclusion from the rest of the world and the other place's preservation of the past allow the matriarch's memory to persist through generations. Sapphira and her descendants are thought to have magical capabilities that further connect the generations. There is a powerful connection between Sapphira Wade, Jonah Day, John-Paul Day, and Miranda Day (see fig. 3). Naylor writes, "and nobody was gonna trifle with Mama Day's [18 & 23], 'cause she know how to use it—her being a direct descendant of Sapphira Wade, piled on the fact of springing from the seventh son of a seventh son—uh, uh" (6). This magical element of the novel suggests a deeper connection between the characters and the island. The theme of "magic always com[ing] with a price" ("The Price") ripples through the novel and represents the consequences of the actions of Sapphira felt by the present inhabitants of Willow Springs. This call for retribution is never explicitly mentioned in the novel. However, the reader is given the impression that the island is demanding something from its inhabitants as a consequence for Sapphira's actions—presumably the murder of Bascombe Wade.

1.3 Trauma

Land memory is comprised of both physical and spiritual trauma. A collection of physical changes and experiences (of those who inhabit the land) over time contribute to the sense of land memory. This sense can be understood as a presence of the past felt by present inhabitants, residual emotions and spiritual understanding connecting generations, and/or a call for retribution. Rico's ideas in *Creating Memory and Cultural Identity in African American Trauma Fiction* are critical to understanding how trauma links to land memory. Rico points to Toni Morrison's efforts toward "recovering the past in literature as a means of repaying a debt to those who lived through it" (*Creating Memory* 5). Naylor attempts to do the same with *Mama Day*. Sapphira's residence, the other place, and the island's memory of the events that transpired there, constructs, preserves, and conveys the past, while influencing the present. Abigail's avoidance of the other place is evidence of the trauma that she experienced there. The other place maintains the memory and trauma that occurred in 1823 and radiates that trauma onto its visitors.

Barash's book, *Collective Memory & the Historical Past*, is also useful in understanding how collective memory is a crucial aspect of land memory. Barash maintains that collective memory is inherently fragmented, much like the land memory I have attributed to Willow Springs and the other place. He also asserts:

It is in the thickness of its many stratifications that symbolic embodiment confers on collective memory a perdurability extending well beyond the lives of those who directly experience a moment in its ongoing and changing articulation. And this perdurability indicates a dimension of symbolic incorporation of language and bodily gesture that constitutes a meta-personal fount of personal and interpersonal interaction. (Barash 59)

This perdurable quality of collective memory extends to land memory. Land memory has an effect on the inhabitants of Willow Springs that has endured for generations and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This is evident by the Candle Walk tradition mentioned earlier, which has withstood the test of time, despite the minor variations due to the fragmented memory. Throughout this analysis, these concepts will be further critiqued and demonstrate how they attribute to the concept of land memory and support my assertion that the land of Willow Springs remembers the trauma that transpired there and how this affects the lives of future inhabitants and descendants of the matriarch for generations to come. This analysis will reveal how Naylor's island (Willow Springs) and her metafictional novel itself—which like memory is fragmented and consists of several versions of the truth—contain and preserve memories of the past and cultural memory.

2. Willow Springs

2.1 *From Collective Memory to Land Memory*

For Nora memory “remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived” (8); and for Barash the term “clearly covers a whole range of possible experiences, actual or fictive, sensuous or intellectual, passive or active” (45). According to these definitions, memory must be considered a version of the truth rather than an accurate account of events; it is collected through all five senses and manipulated over time. Two individuals at the same time and place can have vastly different memories of that experience based on their emotional and physical reaction to it. The relationship between land and memory should not be difficult to conceptualize because of its connection to the human experience. For those capable of remembering, revisiting a site of land

should evoke fragments of that experience. The reaction is akin to rediscovering an object that was obtained from a particular experience—seeing and holding that object is sure to conjure some form of memory, and with that, evoke an emotional reaction.

In Paula Gallant Eckard's essay "The Prismatic Past in *Oral History* and *Mama Day*" she argues that "Memory in *Mama Day* functions not only as a vital component in Miranda's psyche, it exists in the inanimate as well. As Miranda knows, objects hold and resonate the past much like the human mind stores the past in memory" (131). This is clear when Miranda discovers the ledger containing the bill of sale and when Cocoa touches the gravestone of her mother Grace. Naylor writes, "The young hands touch the crumbling limestone as her inner mind remembers" illustrating the relationship between objects and memory (152). The gravestone reminds Cocoa—who only subconsciously knows of the events that transpired—of the trauma that occurred in the past through touch.⁷

Naylor illustrates that memory is inherently fragmentary through the form of the novel, which consists of, what appears to be, three different narratives.⁸ The three narratives provide the reader with fragments of the events that transpire throughout the novel from varying perspectives. Eckard submits that "the three voices push the story forward, and in a paradoxically opposing motion, they reach back in time to maintain connections with the past" (131). The reader is under the impression that the third narrative voice is from George's perspective until the very end of the novel. This perspective, as Eckard states, "proves to be interior dialogues that Cocoa has with George in the Willow Springs graveyard many years after his death" (131). These interior dialogues provide great insight into the concept of collective memory.

Understanding how collective memory functions in Naylor's novel will make the shift from collective memory to land memory much smoother. Naylor's islands—Manhattan, Staten

Island, Willow Springs, and her metaphorical island, the football stadium—function as isolated repositories of collective memory.⁹ The separate narratives mirror these isolated collective memories and illustrate the inherent difficulty that outsiders experience in trying to understand and connect with those in-the-know. These isolated collective memories, Barash would refer to as “the *web of experience* among individuals and groups, in which, at its different levels, memory is entangled” (52 emphasis original). Naylor illustrates this most plainly through George’s perspective; she writes “Unless you’ve been there, you can’t understand what it’s like. Yet, even being there for someone like you wasn’t enough—you’d only see twenty-two men on a field and seventy-odd thousand screaming people. So why tell you what you couldn’t believe?” (124).

George’s love for football is rooted in nostalgia, but this nostalgia acts as a collective memory, inasmuch as those who belong to the collective do not require an explanation of the traditions involved. Ophelia cannot understand the secrets and the emotions the football stadium encompasses, in the same way that George is not privy to the secrets of Willow Springs. Naylor further emphasizes the outsider impediment through her interaction with Dr. Smithfield. She writes, “Being an outsider, he couldn’t be expected to believe the other things Miranda could do. But being a good doctor, he knew another one when he saw her” (84). Miranda’s abilities, like the other secrets of Willow Springs, cannot be understood by outsiders.

Cocoa’s perspective provides insight into the experience of the in-betweens and their connection to the islands. Cocoa’s knowledge of the secrets of Willow Springs is buried deep in her subconscious, but her genetic connection to the Day family and her ritual return to the island in August supplies her with enough knowledge and understanding of the collective memory with which the island is imbued. Cocoa occupies the liminal space of the novel as she tries to connect

with George's island (Staten Island), their mutual island (Manhattan), and her family's island (Willow Springs).

Nevertheless, the most important perspective of the novel is the omniscient narrator who interrupts the story being told by George and Cocoa. Eckard provides great insight into this narrator. She writes:

The Willow Springs voice has a full understanding of everything in the community. It is the spiritual voice of the community, that has knowledge of the past, is fully integrated into the present, and will likely continue into the future long after Miranda and others in Willow Springs are dead. This voice not only knows the history of Sapphira Wade and her descendants, it is privy to Miranda's thoughts and feelings and can describe her actions in detail. (130)

I assert that this narrator is the manifestation of land memory. Consider Willow Springs as the macro-site of memory and the other place as the micro-site. The narrator's knowledge is focused on the past events that have transpired at the other place; all other knowledge is a result of the rippling affect that the other place has had on Willow Springs through the descendants of Sapphira. Barash illustrates how memories can ripple through generations with his example of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech. He writes, "Through the recollections of those who lived through this period, generations born after the 1960s are able to be aware of the event and also of the context in which it occurred" (Barash 55). This reveals how collective memory can be formed through generations, which proves tantamount to the collective memory possessed by the inhabitants of Willow Springs. This shift from collective memory to land memory becomes more rational through the analysis of the relationship between land and memory.

Nora claims that “[m]emory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” which “takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects” (8-9). Memory takes root in the land of Willow Springs, but the trauma that occurs at the other place creates, what Nora would refer to as, *lieux de mémoire*—a site of memory.¹⁰ Nora maintains: “The *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it” (12). The other place is the geographical site that remains of what transpired between Sapphira and Bascombe Wade in 1823 and the subsequent tragedies that have transpired throughout generations of Days. This micro-site is what Nora calls “the ultimate embodiment of a memorial consciousness” (12). Naylor writes, “But something about this place did that to you, it called up old, old memories” (184). The site possesses consciousness that it projects onto the inhabitants of Willow Springs and evokes uneasy feelings in visitors; this consciousness should be referred to as land memory.

2.2 *The Other Place as the Prime Mover*

Memory is considered an ability designated for humans and unique to the individual, which has rendered claims of collective memory difficult to support by many scholars. Yet Naylor’s fictive novel creates a space in the discourse to anthropomorphize her island Willow Springs, but more specifically the trauma site, the other place. The other place acts as the prime mover throughout the novel, constructing, preserving and conveying the past, while influencing the present. Astrid Erll asserts that “Fictional media, such as novels and feature films, are characterized by their power to shape the collective imagination of the past in a way that is truly fascinating for the literary scholar (and somewhat alarming for the historian)” (389). The fictional novel provides a platform for authentic representation embellished by magical realism,

or surrealism, for the purposes of dramatizing a historical experience. Naylor stretches the bounds of memory through the omniscient narrator and the land of Willow Springs, in order to represent the ways in which trauma can ripple through generations. Eckard maintains that the other place acts as “the primary repository of memory,” which helps establish it as the micro-site for land memory (131). By imbuing the other place with a form of consciousness, Naylor illustrates how trauma tethers the past to the present.

Annette Kolodny’s book *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* offers insight into how the other place can be imbued with a form of consciousness, despite its fictive qualities. Kolodny suggests that “fantasy is a particular way of relating to the world” (6). She explores why the line between truth and fantasy, or fiction, can be difficult to negotiate throughout American literature, and points to—what she has termed—“the pastoral impulse” developed in early American writings, as the cause of these blurred lines.¹¹ Kolodny reveals a desire for a fantasy land in early American settlers—men—who envisioned a “natural maternal realm” (3). This produced what Kolodny refers to as “[a] daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction” (4). Naylor shifts Kolodny’s pastoral impulse to create an island as woman. She takes Kolodny’s metaphor of “the land-as-woman” and turns it into reality in her fiction novel—anthropomorphizing the island.¹² The secrets and wisdom—the power—of Willow Springs stems from the matriarch, Sapphira, and presents itself to the future generations of female inhabitants, though further and further removed.

Even Ruby, who is not part of the Day family, but whose family has been inhabitants of the island for generations, has access to the island's power, though she chooses to use it for her own personal gain and vengeance. Ruby's access to this power might be attributed to her house's proximity to the other place (see fig. 1). Only separated by the main road, Ruby's house is just as close to the other place as Miranda's trailer, and appears closer to the other place than Abigail's house. It is clear that the women of the island are capable of harnessing this power in a way that the men cannot. This is evident through another character, Dr. Buzzard. Buzzard has no true healing powers or remedies for his customers. He is a fraud, in it for the money. He cannot harness the power of the island the way that Miranda can, but he pretends to for a sordid profit and undeserved respect by Willow Springs' residents.

Naylor's metafictional novel both imbues the other place with land memory and in itself acts as a repository for a historical representation of trauma—giving an account of the generational fallout felt by descendants of enslaved Africans and African Americans. Erll states that “[f]ictions, both novelistic and filmic, possess the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations” (389). Creating an island that in some ways is frozen in the past allows Naylor to emphasize the effects of trauma. The narrator of *Mama Day* says, “[i]t's all one night, one day—one season. Time don't crawl and time don't fly; time is still. You do with it what you want: roll it up, stretch it out, or here we just let it lie” (Naylor 161). The island has minimal modern conveniences and the inhabitants rely mostly on its agriculture and sustainability. The isolated setting, distortion of time and lack of technological advancements render Willow Springs an even more successful example of how memory and trauma—rooted in the past—can affect the present.

2.2.1 Constructing the Past

Naylor constructs the past of Willow Springs through the other place. The mysterious legend of Sapphira Wade and the events that transpired that August of 1823 are the clear foundation for the collective and cultural memory of the island. The land memory constructs the past because it provides the wisdom for posterity. The actions of Sapphira, whatever the truth may be, shapes the way of life for future inhabitants. Based on Kolodny's work on the pastoral impulse, it would be easy to believe that Bascombe Wade shared a similar sentiment with early American settlers—what she refers to as “a yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine” (8). Deeding the land to Sapphira provides the island with an even stronger female presence, which remains evident throughout the generations of women. The feminine lineage is ensured by having the deed pass down through the matrilineal line.

Naylor also constructs the past through the secrets that are revealed throughout out the novel; the site of the trauma that took place in 1823 holds many secrets. However, the novel slowly reveals those secrets to the reader—whether through the paratexts or the narration—and (re)constructs the past; the narrator says:

There's the west woods, where Miranda's walking now, that's part of the forty-nine hundred acres belonging to the Days. . . . About midways in is the family plot, a lovely stretch of land within a circle of live oaks. Got Miranda's daddy and his six brothers. Got Peace, Grace, Hope, and Peace again. They never found her mama's body, although John-Paul and three of his brothers dragged the bottom of The Sound for a week. Mother flew off that bluff screaming Peace. And she coulda been put to rest with Peace—and later on, Peace again. (Naylor 117)

Here the narrator reveals to the reader some of the trauma that has occurred at the other place.

The reader should wonder at this point why so many deaths are occurring and should raise suspicions about the other place. More is revealed to the reader as Cocoa remembers, “Yes George, you tried hard. But it would have been too much to ask for you to understand those whispers as we passed through my family plot. As soon as I put the moss in my shoes, I could hear them all in the wind as it moved through the trees and stirred up dust along the ground” (Naylor 223). Cocoa sheds some light on the secrets of Willow Springs. The moss that she puts in her shoes suggests some kind of ritual turned habit and the whispers that she hears, but George does not, confirms the island’s magical qualities and the inhabitants’ connection to the trauma that occurred there.

2.2.2 Preserving the Past

Willow Springs is able to anchor memory because the land still belongs to the people who founded it. The land is untouched by outsiders who might be interested in reconstruction or altering it; it has been preserved by the inhabitants and can remain a site of memory—especially because the land is never owned by those in a position to make changes. The ownership of the island plays a key role in preserving the past and the land memory in the other place. Naylor makes this clear through a conversation between George and Cocoa:

George: I wondered how you ever brought yourself to leave a place like this. And you actually *owned* this land.

Cocoa: No, I don’t own it. Our children own it.

George: But we don’t have any children.

Cocoa: Well, once you stop falling out unconscious at night, we will. And then it's theirs. Some kind of crazy clause in our deed. It's always owned two generations down. That's to keep any Day from selling it.

George: But you're two generations down.

Cocoa: Yeah, but once I was born it automatically flipped over to them.¹³ (219)

This deed prevents the land from being disturbed further, whether by the inhabitants or by outsiders. The land cannot be sold and the inhabitants do their part to preserve the land as, what Eckard refers to as, the repository of memory.¹⁴ Rico also asserts that “places or sites of memory become the repository of ancient wisdom and folk tradition and figure as key catalysts for the retrieval of the past and the discovery” (*Creating Memory* 8). The other place is embedded with the knowledge and experiences of Sapphira and functions as the original wise old woman of the island.

All future generations of Day women have a strong connection to this land and can best interpret the wisdom that radiates off the land. Rico further maintains that “*Mama Day* focuses on the ways in which time can continually shape the memory of a past event while at the same time preserving it as the community’s foundation” (*Creating Memory* 7). The entire island of Willow Springs is involved in preserving the past, but the other place serves as the nexus of memory and trauma. Even the island itself is shaped like a kidney bean, which is a non-perishable item (see fig. 1). This preservation of the past—the land memory—makes it possible to convey the past to future generations. Their connection to the island provides them with a stronger connection to their past, which might otherwise fall short by mere storytelling.

2.2.3 Conveying the Past

The generational ties, persistent in *Mama Day*, create a smoother pathway for memories of the past to be conveyed to those in the present. As long as the inhabitants remain on the island they have access to this knowledge in some form. They might have direct access to it—like Miranda—or they might only experience it through the island’s traditions and customs—such as Candle Walk night. Even the outsiders and the in-betweens are granted some access simply by being on the island. George has no true knowledge of the privileged past, but he can sense its presence. Cocoa’s subconscious is riddled with knowledge of the past, but her access is limited. Eckard argues that “the past looms over the present to significantly influence the daily life of the community” (131). The lack of modern conveniences and technology of the island exemplify the past’s influence on daily life. The tethering of past and present inhabitants to the land memory and to one another, makes it possible for the past to be conveyed to the present inhabitants.

2.2.4 Influencing the Present

Naylor’s novel itself highlights how the past can influence the present through the legend of Sapphira Wade and its effect on the youngest descendant—Cocoa. The land memory of Willow Springs will not allow the inhabitants to forget, and the descendants of Sapphira will always know things about the past that others may not. Eckard maintains that “Miranda returns to [the other place] to tap into its memory, for the power and knowledge the place contains. She reaches into the past in order to effect change in the present” (132). The descendants are genetically tied to the trauma that occurs at the other place, originally and over time. Abigail attempts to push away these memories by staying away from the other place—of course, she is still unable to forget. Miranda leans into the pain and harnesses its power. Rico submits: “Many scholars . . . have analyzed the ways in which a particular place can be, throughout time, imbued

with memories and experiences, becoming inscribed by them and changing the ways its inhabitants feel, act, and relate to that place” (*Creating Memory* 28). Abigail and Miranda have experienced the same traumas and are connected to the same past, but act differently in response to them. Abigail fears the power more than Miranda does, which is presumably why Miranda’s connection seems stronger—she does not resist the influence of the past.

3. Land Memory

3.1 *Trauma and Perspectives*

It can be assumed that land memory is not limited to only harnessing tragedy, but it can also absorb happy memories and later, radiate positive energy. However, it is likely that the inhabitants of this land and its visitors would be less aware of the positive energies than they would negative ones. If unexplained happiness occurs, no one questions if it is caused by the memory embedded in the land. When a sudden uneasy feeling comes over a person, the notion that the location could be causing it is more common. The individual would be overcome with a sense that something *bad* happened there. This negative energy is more recognizable and is what should be focused on when discussing land memory. Rico submits that “the space can stand almost as a document in which the memories of each of the events that happened there become inscribed as on a palimpsest” (*Creating Memory* 28). In this way, the memories are available to be accessed, but might be in an unknown language. The inhabitants can understand it, but the outsiders need a translation.

In *Mama Day*, when George visits the other place, at first he encounters a beautiful garden and home. George—an outsider to Willow Springs—imagines the romantic side of Bascombe Wade who created a space for him and Sapphira deep in the woods so that they could be together. Naylor writes:

It was a nice image but it didn't feel that way. The place felt uneasy in spite of the gentle breezes coming from The Sound. That house had known a lot of pain. And more than what you talked about: your great-grandmother, Ophelia, losing her baby daughter at the bottom of a well; closing herself off from her husband and her children. Your grandmother hating the place so much she hadn't set foot there in over fifty years. No, there was something more, and something deeper than the old historical line about slave women and their white masters. (225)

George's surface level romantic notions about the other place are quickly set aside after he has had a moment to connect with the land. Even George can feel the trauma emanating off of the other place. Beyond what he has been told by Cocoa, George can sense that the events that occurred on this microsite are embedded deep in the soil and affect the entire island. His connection to Cocoa and accordingly his connection to the trauma that has rippled through the descendants of Sapphira might grant him this limited access. George's marriage to Cocoa binds him to the unavoidable fate that has overcome the men who fall in love with Day women. It is something more powerful than history and storytelling—it is memory and trauma. Eckard argues that “[George] ends up sacrificing his own life, but in doing so [he] ironically becomes fully assimilated into the community. George has no knowledge of his family or ancestral ties, but although he had no personal history of his own—a result of being an orphan and growing up in a shelter for boys—through death George contributes to the collective history of Willow Springs and becomes part of its lore and memory” (132). George's death becomes another piece of the land memory and trauma.

3.2 Trauma Work by Rico and the Power of the Other Place

Patricia San José Rico's book *Creating Memory and Cultural Identity in African American Trauma Fiction* and her essay "The Trauma behind the Myth: The Necessity to Recover the Past in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*" are critical for understanding how memory and trauma function in Naylor's novel and reinforce the concept of land memory. Rico asserts that "[t]he memory of a traumatic past—even a highly mythicized version of it can be embedded in a community's group consciousness to the point that it becomes the basis for the foundation of their collective identity" ("The Trauma behind the Myth" 78). Naylor shifts the idea of a community's group consciousness, by creating a space for these memories in the land of the other place. Other members of the community, who are not direct descendants of Sapphira, reveal their knowledge of the other place throughout the text. Bernice pleads to Miranda, "[m]aybe we could go to the other place, Mama Day?" (Naylor 43). Bernice knows that the other place harnesses the power of the island and that Miranda can tap into it to help her conceive a child. Dr. Buzzard also knows of its power and fears it. When Miranda warns him to stay away from Bernice, she mockingly says "What could a tired old woman like me do to a powerful hoodoo doctor? Why, that little mess I got out at the other place wouldn't hold a candle to—" (51). Dr. Buzzard interrupts, "Ain't nobody talking about the other place" (52). He knows what Miranda is capable of and attributes her power to her connection to the land. The inhabitants understand that the trauma ensued by the matriarch of the island has affected the ways of the island and the community. The other place becomes the repository for the community's group consciousness and their collective identity.

Additionally, Rico submits: "When history bears the marks of trauma, it needs to be acknowledged both by the perpetrators and by the victims or their descendants in order to

prevent its repetition, promote understanding and achieve the completion of the process of working through” (“The Trauma” 79). The perpetrators and the victims are difficult to identify in the community of Willow Springs. The island’s history is more complicated than this binary construction. Some of the inhabitants of Willow Springs are thought to be descendants of both Sapphira and Bascombe Wade, but it is also difficult to assess which of these two is the more guilty character. Bascombe Wade is a white slave owner, which would make him the perpetrator. However, legend suggests that he was murdered by Sapphira, which would also make him a victim. Sapphira is a slave owned by and married to Bascombe Wade, but the circumstances of this relationship are lost on the reader and the inhabitants of Willow Springs. Sapphira’s slave status establishes her victim status, but the actions that she took to gain her freedom might also establish her as—as per Rico’s terminology—the perpetrator. Either way this mysterious history is examined, the descendants of Sapphira and Bascombe Wade are a product of both the perpetrator and the victim. In an effort to bring clarity to this confusing past, Rico illustrates:

Here we have a first woman (Sapphira) who wants ‘to go with peace’ that is, leave Bascombe Wade and go back to her motherland; a second woman (Ophelia) wanting ‘to go with Peace,’ her younger daughter who fell down a well; two men (Bascombe Wade and John-Paul) who had their hearts broken with the pain of losing the women they loved; and finally the number of times that trauma has repeated itself across generations. (“The Trauma” 81)

It is because the perpetrator cannot be distinguished from the victim and that the inhabitants of Willow Springs are descendants of both, that the other place functions as such a powerful nexus of land memory. The inhabitants of Willow Springs are navigating the liminal space between perpetrator and victim, which prevents them from fully acknowledging the trauma that occurs at

the other place. This inability to confront the trauma feeds the power of the other place and condemns the inhabitants to live through repetitions of tragedy and to exist in a liminal stasis—ambiguous as to the true sources of their traumatic dramatic rituals.

The descendants of Sapphira believe that keeping the magic of the other place a secret will help prevent the consequences of harnessing that power. Rico states that “[t]he reason for this silence lies in the traumatic nature of the original story, a story preserved only in the minds of the two eldest descendants of Sapphira—and, presumably, Bascombe Wade—Miranda (Mama) Day and her sister Abigail” (“The Trauma” 79). Abigail believes that never stepping foot on the other place and staying silent about the traumas that occurred there will prevent any further tragedy from taking place. Miranda believes that she can harness the power of the other place and use it for good as long as the magic is kept secret. When she helps Ambush and Bernice Duvall conceive a child (139-40), Ambush and the reader are unaware of what occurs at the other place in order to make this happen. Only Miranda and Bernice are in the know and Bernice is told to keep it a secret indefinitely, Miranda says “[I]f it turns out that we gotta go to the other place together in the end, what happens there we gotta keep a secret. Not a secret for now or a secret for then—but a secret forever” (87). Bernice’s silence buys her time with her son, but the consequences of that magic catch up with her, and her son is taken from her during the hurricane. Naylor writes, “[f]olks is sure to disagree for years about what caused the death of Little Caesar. A drowning in them gullies dug out by the storm. Live wires hanging from the electric poles. There’s no eyewitnesses to the condition of the body as his mama drives him up the main road—some things you just can’t watch” (256). This event adds to the trauma, memory and secrets of the island; no one wants to witness the trauma and, presumably, Bernice and Miranda are the only ones who know how or why the trauma occurs.

The other place is riddled with the traumatic past of the Day family. Rico outlines the tragedies that have befallen Miranda and Abigail: “The early death of Peace (Abigail and Miranda’s sister), the suicide of their mother Ophelia, the death of another Peace (Abigail’s daughter) and, later, of Grace (Cocoa’s mother) haunt the two elder survivors of the Day family like a ghost” (“The Trauma” 80). This haunting, which could exist for any individual who experiences this amount of loss, is amplified by the land memory of the other place and the rippling effect that it has on Willow Springs.

Naylor reveals the consciousness of the other place when Miranda visits the graveyard with Cocoa—the narrator says, “They’re walking through time. . . . The shadows erase the lines on the old brown woman’s face and shorten the legs of the young pale one. They near the graveyard within the circle of live oaks and move down into time” (150). The land brings Miranda and Cocoa physically and spiritually back to a time when Cocoa was more open to hearing Miranda. This moment reveals the beginning days of Willow Springs and the beginning of the generations of Days. The narrator says “[t]he other place. Butterflies and hummingbirds. And the wisdom to draw them. Ancient eyes, sad and tired: it’s time you knew. An old house with a big garden. And it’s seen its share of pain” (Naylor 152). This reinforced the consciousness of the other place. The land memory will be revealed to Cocoa more than it has been in the past—the secrets will be unveiled and she will have a better understanding of the trauma that occurred on that island, even if this knowledge is still buried within her subconscious.

As Cocoa “brushes the dried weeds away from her mother’s headstone,” Miranda is reminded of the generations of Day women blessed—as she sees it—with the ability to break a man’s heart (Naylor 151). Miranda thinks Cocoa should have been given a stronger name, she

says, “[m]y grandmother only softly broke a heart. My great-great-grandmother tore one wide open” (151). Naylor’s belief that there is power in names is projected onto her character, Miranda who believes that Cocoa would have a better chance at finding peace if she was given a stronger name. Rico stresses that “the credence that the Day women are bound to break their men’s hearts . . . is passed on like a curse through the subsequent generations of Days with such a force that it keeps repeating itself without a chance, for the direct protagonists, of avoiding its impact” (“The Trauma” 80). Naylor writes, “[U]p and down this path, somehow, a man dies from a broken heart” (Naylor 118). Miranda and Abigail attempt to shield Cocoa from this traumatic history for a long time by keeping it secret. Cocoa, who has a sense of this trauma, but does not acknowledge it, cannot be spared the inevitable curse—George dies of a broken heart.¹⁵

This ability to break a man’s heart is seen as a blessing by Miranda because she has the most access to the land memory of the other place. Miranda says, “[l]et this be another one, I told God, who could break a man’s heart. Didn’t women suffer enough?” (Naylor 151). Presumably, since Sapphira gained her freedom and found peace by breaking the heart of the man that loved her, generations of Days have found peace the same way. Miranda believes that this peace is essential despite the further loss that it may bring. The women of Willow Springs are damned to navigate these tensions indefinitely. The land demands that the original trauma be repeated in order to restore temporary peace by completing the pattern and performing the ritual.

4. The Island Remembers

4.1 *African Diaspora*

The land memory of Willow Springs is rooted in the legend of Sapphira Wade. Both act as ambiguous driving forces of the novel. Although the reader does not know the truth or even the entire story—fictional or otherwise—of Sapphira, it is clear that the murder of Bascombe

Wade was motivated by her desire for freedom. Maxine L. Montgomery asserts that “[Sapphira’s] acts of aggression are consistent with those attributed to black women in the African Diaspora in that those gestures are covert, isolated and individualized rather than large-scale or collective” (161). Naylor uses the legend of Sapphira Wade and the generational trauma that follows to contribute to the discourse on the African American experience. Rico maintains that “[t]he history of the African American community . . . is demarcated by a series of painful and traumatic events that can be traced to the Middle Passage, the very moment of the slaves’ forced dislocation from Africa, dating back to the seventeenth century” (*Creating Memory* 3). The story of Sapphira’s journey from Africa is never told, but the story about her descendants, the Day family, gives the reader a glimpse of this experience. Freedom is the motivation for Sapphira’s actions and freedom remains a motivating factor in the lives of her descendants.

By imbuing the island with land memory, Naylor highlights how generations of African Americans can share the pain of the trauma experienced by their ancestors. Rico states that there is a “shared traumatic past” and that the “former status as Africans brought by force to a foreign country and compelled to work as slaves as well as their ongoing experience of racism and oppression in the US” feeds into this collective memory (*Creating Memory* 3). The land memory of the other place acts as a physical representation of this spiritual connection between generations. Naylor writes: “So Miranda is staring past her dried herbs, past the birth of Hope and Grace, past the mother, who ended her life in The Sound, on to the Mother who began the Days. She sees one woman leave by wind. Another leave by water. She smells the blood from the broken hearts of the men who they cursed for not letting them go” (262-3). Miranda’s connection to Sapphira’s traumatic past is stronger than any other Willow Springs inhabitant. Miranda knows a lot more about the island’s traumatic past than has been relayed to her—her

senses are amplified when she visits the other place. This passage reveals the generational desire for freedom can be traced back to Sapphira. Montgomery suggests that “As the mediating transatlantic figure uniting black cultures across the African Diaspora and a guardian of crossroads and entrances, [Miranda] embodies a reconciliation of the dialectical tension between masculine and feminine, self and other, sacred and profane” (163). Naylor uses Miranda to illustrate how strong the connection between the past and the present can be; how land memory can function across generations.

4.2 *Cultural Memory*

Barash argues that collective memory “is a meta-personal sameness that, unless interrupted by new social patterns and institutions, extends beyond the scope of memory retained by all contemporaneously living generations” (91). Willow Springs inherently welcomes collective and cultural memory because of its isolation and its ability to block out modern advancements. The other place acts as the repository for the trauma, but the entire island acts as a repository for the cultural memory that has been fostered there. Daphne Lamothe submits that “[o]n Willow Springs, the Day family, a community of women, preserve their cultural memory through the repetition of material practices that include cooking and weaving and through the transmission of personal and communal stories” (155). These practices by themselves might allow the cultural memory to dissipate over time, but the land memory of the other place helps to preserve them.

Mama Day creates a space in the discourse that proves helpful in understanding the cultural memory and collective trauma that pervades the African American community. Rico states:

Whether memoirs or fictional accounts, as long as the narration of the traumatic experience maintains a degree of fidelity to the historical truth, trauma writing can help readers explore and be instrumental in the remembrance—albeit not necessarily the overcoming—of historical traumas that have survived generations, sometimes embedded in places that still bear the resonances of the atrocities committed (*Creating Memory* 54-5).

The land memory of the other place is a fictional representation of a collective trauma. However, this novel can be utilized to understand how collective trauma can function throughout history. Rico further asserts that “the memory of a traumatic past—even a highly mythicized version of it—can be embedded in a community’s group consciousness to the point that it becomes the basis for the foundation of their collective identity” (“The Trauma” 78). Naylor uses Sapphira’s past and Miranda’s present to highlight this collective identity through their status as conjure women.

4.3 *Matriarch(s)*

The progenitor matriarch of Willow Springs, Sapphira Wade, is the nexus of both the novel and of collective memory and trauma. Sapphira becomes the consciousness of the other place and imbues the rest of Willow Springs with her knowledge and power, which generates the land memory. Andrews argues that “[i]n *Mama Day* the power comes from folk tradition, from ‘foremothering,’ and from nature, as Naylor moves into the realm of matriarchal mythmaking”¹⁶ (1). The folk tradition of oral storytelling has transformed the story of Sapphira Wade to the myth and later the legend. The truth about Sapphira is woven throughout the tales, but as generations come and go, the less of this truth is known. This is evident in the ritual of Candle Walk night as the original practices are forgotten and morphed into new ones—all in recognition

of Sapphira. Naylor writes: “My daddy said that his daddy said when he was young, Candle Walk was different still. It weren’t about no candles, was about a light that burned in a man’s heart” (308). Stories about Sapphira and the island of Willow Springs become more exaggerated and unrealistic as different versions emerge—especially from the point of view of those over the bridge—the outsiders. Naylor writes:

You might believe some of the more far-fetched stories about Willow Springs:

The island got spit out from the mouth of God, and when it fell to the earth it brought along an army of stars. He tried to reach down and scoop them back up, and found Himself shaking hands with the greatest conjure woman on earth.

“Leave ‘em here, Lord,” she said. “I ain’t got nothing but these poor black hands to guide my people, but I can lead on with light.” Nothing but a story, and if there’s an ounce of truth in it, it can’t even weigh that much.¹⁷ (110)

Sapphira is the foundation for tradition in Willow Springs. Although the truth about how the inhabitants came to hold the deed to the island has been distorted by time, what is true for them, is that their matriarch had the power to obtain it for them. The one constant in the celebrations of Candle Walk over time, is the utilization of light in various forms—from stars, lightening, and candles—which tethers this practice from the past to the present. The light is associated with Sapphira and her gift of the island to future inhabitants; they may not remember who or why, but they remember the power of the light.

The land memory established by the actions of its matriarch helps to solidify the bonds between the women of Willow Springs. Andrews posits that “both the contemporary and the historical bonds between women are important, for connection to the past helps make possible a connection in the present” (2). Generations of Days have had the power of Sapphira coursing

through their veins. Naylor's protagonist, Miranda, has exhibited a stronger connection to Sapphira and a heightened understanding of the powers passed down to her than other Day women. Andrews asserts that this concentration of power could be a result of Miranda's traumatic experiences. He writes, "[f]orced prematurely into a nurturing role in her family after her mother's suicide, Miranda eventually becomes not only a mother to her grandniece Ophelia but a 'Mama' to the whole island community of Willow Springs" (Andrews 6). The abilities that Miranda is imbued with before her mother's suicide—probably similar to what Abigail and Cocoa experience—are certainly amplified by the traumatic event and her subsequent role. The all-encompassing role of "mother," that Miranda finds herself in, connects her to Sapphira and the land memory more so than any other inhabitant.

Susan Willis, in her book *Specifying: Black Women Writing, the American Experience*, maintains that "For black women history is a bridge defined among motherliness"¹⁸ (6). Naylor shifts this assertion and reveals how land memory acts as a bridge between the past and the present through generations of women—descendants of the matriarch. Montgomery states that Naylor is connecting Sapphira to her African roots and argues that "[a]s if to align her rebellious slaves throughout the transatlantic world, the island matriarch is of pure African stock" (155). This connection can be best illustrated by the magical rituals that run throughout the text and Miranda's magical abilities. Montgomery submits that "[c]onjure allows the island matriarch to maintain a spiritual connection with Africa and enjoy an expanded sphere of influence outside house and field, the two realms of work defining the black female experience during and after slavery" (156). Miranda, the present matriarch of Willow Springs, taps into the power of Sapphira through the other place and practices conjure in order to help other inhabitants and

descendants. Conjure also connects generations of the inhabitants of Willow Springs physically with the island and spiritually with Africa.

4.4 *Consequences of Past Actions*

The land memory of the other place can be understood as a consequence of the trauma that occurred on the site of land. This trauma—presumably the death of Bascombe Wade—starts the rippling of consequences throughout the story. The actions of Sapphira are understood to be rooted in magic of some kind. Legend refers to her as a conjure woman, although it is not clear what her true abilities were. The consequences themselves speak to the level of trauma that the land absorbed in 1823—“magic always comes with a price” (“The Price”). Andrews argues that “[w]hen Sapphira Wade liberated herself from her white husband and master, Bascombe Wade . . . she initiated a tradition of female power as well as a religious tradition . . . and strengthened the myth of the great conjure woman on hand at God’s creation of the island” (6). However, the female power that has passed down to generations of women on the island has also passed down a curse upon the men who fall in love with them.

Bascombe Wade’s curse is repeated through John-Paul and George. These men both die of—literally and/or metaphorically—of a broken heart. Naylor writes, “Miranda . . . takes a final look around her garden before she turns her face to the sky. Grey. The color you’d get from blending a bridal dress and a funeral veil” (243). This description suggests that Miranda often associates marriage and death—an association developed by her experience—which foreshadows George and Cocoa’s fate. The power of the women and the misfortune inflicted upon the men are consequences of the magic utilized by Sapphira. She sacrifices a piece of herself so that her children and her children’s children will be free and protected—whether or not she understood the consequences that would follow, the reader cannot know.

The consequences of magic are also apparent when Ruby violates the trust between herself and Cocoa by weaving a curse through her hair and into her scalp. Ruby has the ability to tap into the powers of the island, but she chooses to do so out of personal gain and hate, rather than as a healer like Miranda. As Ruby performs the ultimate betrayal, Naylor writes: “A soft hypnotic voice with firm fingers massaging that warm solution into my scalp. It’s gonna make this pretty hair of yours prettier—she kept rubbing and rubbing—and these braids, she’d make sure these braids would hold good” (246). Ritual is necessary for the curse to work. Ruby is tactful as she uses the excuse to do Cocoa’s braids—as she did throughout her childhood—to poison her. Cocoa does not suspect that the hypnotic voice, the rubbing and the braiding are in any way malicious. Naylor writes:

The teeth of the comb dig in just short of hurting as she scratches the scalp showing through the parted hair before she dips her fingers into the round jar and massages the warm solution down its length. The second big part crosses the first, going east to west, and this time she dips her fingers into the square jar, massaging hard. North to south, east to west, round to square. (246)

Ruby has concocted a second solution—one that is poisonous—and uses traditional braiding techniques to reinforce the curse on Cocoa. The ritual repetition of the east to west movement gives the curse its power. Miranda retaliates with her own magic—magic that comes from the same source that she chooses to use differently, but not this time. Miranda sets a curse on Ruby’s house and it explodes, thus illustrating the consequences of Ruby’s past actions.

4.5 Conclusion

The hurricanes that come through Willow Springs act as a restoration of order. When payment is not made for the magic that is used—such as the conception of Bernice’s child—the

storm comes in and restores balance, in this case taking the life of that child. Miranda has a vision of the storm that will come and the death it will bring. When she visits the other place she thinks, “Maybe not this time . . . but one time a wind’s gonna come and blow this old house down. That’s when it’s soaked up about as much sorrow as it can and ain’t nothing left for it to do but rot in little pieces at the bottom of The Sound” (Naylor 243). Naylor reveals the house that sits on the other place as a repository of sorrow. The land and living space of the other place is pervaded with the memory and trauma of the past. Naylor suggests that the land memory can only go so far before it festers and the storm brings the ultimate restoration of order to the island. The lifespan of land memory seems to be determined by the amount of trauma the land can bear.

Mama Day is the ideal example of how land memory can exist in recent American fiction. The isolated aspect that the island presents and the lack of external influence on modern advancements creates a space that can successfully preserve past memories and customs to influence the present. The importance of the island’s memory lies in its effort to keep ancestral memory and trauma intact for posterity. By creating a novel with an island that remembers its traumatic past and ripples the effects of this trauma through generations of future inhabitants, Naylor reveals how African culture and the trauma surrounding African diaspora can persist in those that have no, as Barash would say, in the flesh experience (41). The traumatic experience is not required of every individual in order to understand the pain of the past through ancestral ties and land memory. The land memory will connect present inhabitants to their past.

Notes

1. Daphne Lamothe, in her essay, “Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*: Bridging Roots and Routes,” asserts that “On Willow Springs, the Day family, a community of women, preserve their cultural memory through the repetition of material practices that include cooking and weaving, and through the transmission of personal and communal stories” (155).

2. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Collective Memory & the Historical Past*, p. 40.

3. Laura Nicosia, in her essay, “Authorial Manipulation and Privileged Narrative: *Mama Day* and its Paratextual Documents,” argues that “The *reader*, through examination of materials, is able to learn what everyone in Willow Springs seeks” (1).

4. Jenni Adams, in her essay, “Cities Under a Sky of Mud: Landscapes of Mourning in Holocaust Texts,” provides insight into how “magical realist techniques” can be used to “negotiate the complex ethical and representational difficulties which surround the representation of the Holocaust,” which for the purposes of this project can be shifted to apply to Naylor’s novel and embedded cultural history (158).

5. Barash submits that collective memory “presents an immediate difficulty as soon as we attempt to clarify it,” because “its primary signification, remembrance is carried out in the original sphere of the self.” However, in defense of collective memory, he further stipulates that “members of the community, as vast as it may be, may share remembrances of what can be publicly communicated through word, image, and gesture” (40).

6. Just to name those that I have utilized: Jeffrey Andrew Barash’s *Collective Memory and the Historical Past*; Berberich, Campbell and Robert Hudson’s *Land & Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice*; Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning’s *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*; Daphne Lamothe’s “Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*: Bridging Roots and Routes;” Patricia

San José Rico's *Creating Memory and Cultural Identity in African American Trauma Fiction* and "The Trauma behind the Myth: The Necessity to Recover the Past in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*."

7. Patricia San José Rico, "The Trauma behind the Myth: The Necessity to Recover the Past in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*" p. 81.

8. Paula Gallant Eckard, "The Prismatic Past in *Oral History* and *Mama Day*" p.131.

9. Eckard, p. 121.

10. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*" p. 7.

11. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, p. 6.

12. Kolodny, p. 150.

13. This is not original formatting; this arrangement for purpose of emphasis.

14. See Note 3.

15. Rico, "The Trauma behind the Myth," p. 81.

16. Eckard also mentions, p. 129.

17. Montgomery mentions, p. 156.

18. Larry R. Andrews mentions Willis and her thoughts in his essay, p. 6.

Appendix



Fig. 1. Map of Willow Springs (Naylor).

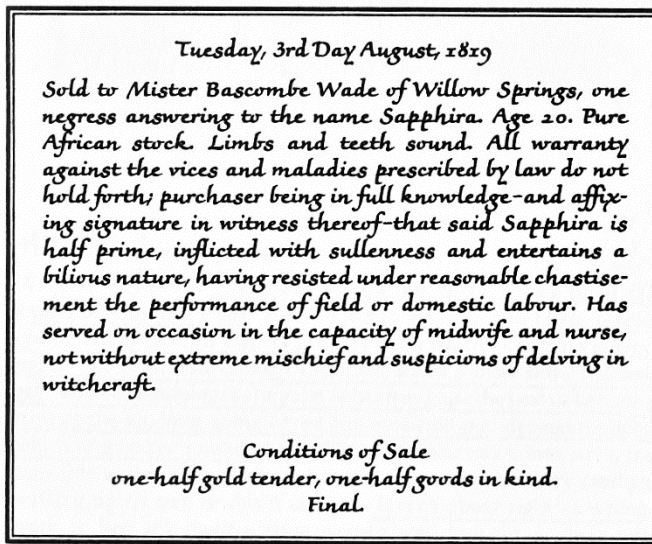


Fig. 2. Bill of Sale (Naylor).

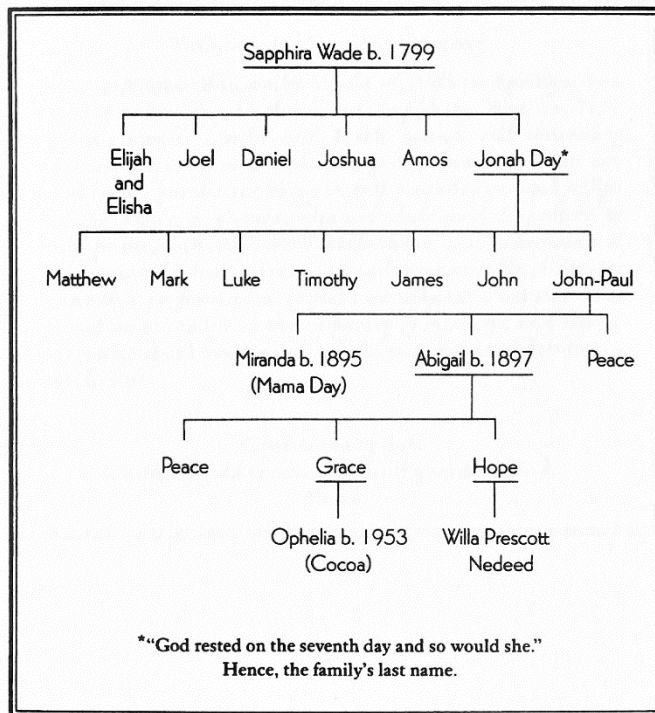


Fig. 3. Family Tree (Naylor).

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